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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Subject: "JELLING FOR SELLING." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, and the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

---ooOoo---

This is not going to be the same old jelly-making story that you home-makers have been hearing each year at preserving-season. This is going to be a different story -- a story about the jelly that went to market and the jelly that stayed home. I am telling it today especially for those listeners who may be counting on extra cash this summer from the sale of their homemade fruit jellies. But the story should also be of interest to anyone who makes jelly, or to anyone who buys it.

Of course, if every batch of jelly came out perfect, all the jelly that goes to market and all that stays home would be alike -- all would have the qualities which make what our grandmothers called "choice" jelly. Choice or fine jelly, as good jelly-makers always have defined it, is a clear, translucent fruit-juice-and-sugar product of quivering tenderness, which has the sparkling bright natural color and natural flavor of the fruit used, which holds its shape when turned from a mold, and, when cut, breaks in sharp cleavages.

Unfortunately, not all fruit jelly answers this description. Some cooks don't understand the difference between fine and poor quality jelly. Some don't know how to make successful jelly. And some have "hard luck" with a batch now and then. Fine jelly is not so easy to make; the different ways in which it can fail are legion. Jelly can refuse to jell, for one thing, and it can come out tough, sticky, gummy, sirupy, or dull in color and poor in flavor. Lots of sad things can happen, as any jelly-maker will testify. So occasionally a family may have to finish up a batch of mother's jelly that didn't turn out well. For a hungry and not too particular family of youngsters, say, this may not be much of a hardship. They probably won't complain if the jelly on their bread is not quite up to standard.

But when jelly does not come out well, it should at least stay home -- needs must stay home. Aside from the fact that you can't satisfy customers long if you try to sell them a poor product, you have to consider marketing standards nowadays when you put jelly up for sale. Many States and some cities as well as the Federal Food and Drug Administration have standards for jelly on sale as for other food products. These standards are to protect the consumer, to help her get an honest product -- in the case of jelly, to assure her of getting the kind of jelly housewives have always considered good.

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If you are making jelly for sale nowadays, you will be wise to give special thought to the amount of moisture or water in your jelly. Under Federal Food and Drug Administration rulings, jelly containing less than the normal amount of fruit juice, or containing excess fruit moisture or added water that should be evaporated in cooking is considered an imitation. According to these rulings, which are based on good household and trade practice of years, the fruit juice should weigh as much or more than the sugar. This prevents the sale of a product made up largely of water, pectin, acid and sugar with very little actual fruit juice. It also prevents the sale of jelly made from a second extraction of juice from the fruit. Most jelly-makers know that fruits like currants, crabapples, and wild grapes which are rich in pectin and acid will give a jelling liquid if they are cooked up and strained more than once. This second-extraction jelly may be all right to use at home as a sweet spread, but it cannot sell labeled as "pure fruit jelly" because it lacks the flavor and food value which came out in the first extraction, and because it contains too much moisture.

The way to get the most flavor and color in first-extraction jelly is to add no water or very little water to juicy tender fruits like berries and currants, and to add only enough water for softening and boiling up such firm fruits as apples and quinces. Then, cook the fruit until it breaks up and "loosens" the juice. But avoid overcooking which spoils the natural fruit flavor and the color. Put the hot fruit pulp directly into the jelly-bag and start the flow through the bag by slight pressure. As the juice begins to cool and congeal on the bag, use more pressure. (Hands are good for this pressing, but if you keep yours lily-white, better use wooden paddles.) Juice which has been pressed out may be cloudy. But you can clarify it by straining it again through a clean jelly bag.

Use a wide shallow flat-bottomed kettle to cook the juice and sugar. Such a kettle allows for rapid evaporation -- brings the mixture to the jelling-point without the long cooking that spoils flavor and color. (By the way, use measure for measure of juice and sugar, or use slightly more juice than sugar, depending on your fruit.)

The question of when to take the jelly from the stove is most important for successful and salable jelly. The most practical way to tell when the sirup reaches the jelling stage is to use the so-called "sheeting-off" test. Keep dipping a large spoon in the boiling sirup, lifting it up, and letting the sirup run off the side of the spoon. As the sirup cooks down, it reaches a stage where it will no longer run off the spoon in a steady stream, but will separate into 2 distinct lines of drops which "sheet" together. Stop the cooking as soon as the boiling sirup shows this "sheeting-off."

Another point. Even when you have a market for a large supply of jelly, you will be wise not to try to make it in quantity. Jelly is one of those things that is best made in small amounts. Cook your fruit in small lots -- only 6 or 8 pounds of fruit at a time, and then cook the sirup in small lots -- only 4 to 6 cups of juice at a time.

For home use, the familiar jelly-glasses with friction-top lids are the customary containers. But when you put up jelly for sale, use special glasses fitted with rubber gaskets which seal tightly. Jelly which is to be shipped will stand transportation better if it is slightly more firm in texture than the most delicate jelly for home use.
